

in light, in love; stitch me up, stitch me up by ceruleanstorm

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Relationships: Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper

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Summary:

The others picked on her sometimes, even if it was the kind of familiar teasing she was so lucky to now have, joking that it's uncool, girly and the hobby of grandmothers, but she brushes it off. Because she loves it and she's good at it- or knows she will be, eventually. Because Eleven is tired of looking at all the beautiful pictures Jonathan takes of her, of looking in the mirror, and only ever seeing a weapon of destruction and decay.

A.k.a: El turns out to have an hidden talent for knitting, her boyfriend looks good in scarves, and every one in Hawkins could use a little love.

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Author's Note:

okay so a couple weeks ago i went to the writing wife elevenperalta/ jormaperalta with a headcanon:

What if Flo teaches El how to knit?

So we went back and forth for a few weekends just pouring out all these headcanons that came with the idea and eventually we got around to writing this. We're really excited to explore them with you guys, not only to have some fun with Mileven and the amazing people of Hakwins, but to explore Eleven's character.

Also things I learned to do for the stranger things fandom: learned how to knit ;)

When El first picked up the needles, it was just supposed to be a distraction.

Not an addiction. Not an obsession that the adults in her life whispered behind doors left open a crack to soothe that familiar anxiety, that Nancy discussed using terms she highlighted in bright yellow from a used psychology textbook at university, late in the Wheelers' kitchen when she came to stay a weekend and El found herself at the top of the landing, nails freshly painted by Holly, wondering when they would ever stop seeing her as "damaged goods," as defined by what was done to her behind doors that stayed closed.

Healing came in stages- for all them- and El watches as those around slowly picked up the pieces of their lives that had been shattered by the night of November 6th. Hopper wastes Thursday afternoons starting and abandoning projects in the Byers' house as Will sits, shoulders stooped, at the kitchen table surrounded by the color pencils El gave him last Christmas, drawing through the monsters he battles. Mike, to everyone's surprise, had asked for a guitar and

lessons when he turned fifteen, forever painting El's summers with melodies that rang throughout the basement, hair falling in his face, El fighting the urge to brush it back fearing she'd break his focus. El, like her loved ones, finds retribution in her hands; Dr. de Lacy has her learning to sign on top of her speaking exercises, and El enjoys that her hands can save her where words fail her. And in the same way, the click of the needles, the tangles of yarn, and the repetitive motion of her hands over and over bring her simple joy and healing that sometimes feels so unreachable.

The summer of '86 comes to a quiet end, and El waves Will and Mike goodbye on their first morning of Sophomore year. Since all the adults in El's life tell her she's not "ready" for school yet, she spends her days bouncing around various places, tagging along behind Hopper nursing a large cup of coffee to fight his urge to smoke, or Joyce, who insists on burying her in coats and sweaters ("It's *September*, Joyce! Does she really need all of that?" "She's so *small*, Hop!") before El is allowed to leave the house with her, all over Hawkins until she can go home or go to Mike's place. Even though it's school time and Mike isn't there during the day, she *loves* Mike's house. It's her favorite place, especially the basement.

But she likes the police station too. They all know her name and her "birthday": they'd even given her own mailbox next to the other officers' in celebration of her fourteenth. El knows it's honorary, but that doesn't stop her from decorating the wooden panels, using little red heart stickers, courtesy of Holly. Hopper usually has to be in the office, where's she is no longer allowed after the Tape Incident with Will ("When can I be in there with you again? I promise I won't touch the tape." "Not until you can prove you're responsible enough to use it" Hopper never fails to remind her, and it earns him a sigh that would have made Mike proud), so she stays in the front of the station with Flo, and pointedly rolls her eyes at her guardian when he makes a show of taking all of Flo's tape and locking it in one of Officer Powell's drawers.

Flo... Flo is good. She always has sweets, tucked away in the corner of her desk so Callahan can't steal all of them, and her hair is very pretty. El would sometimes waste away mornings, drawing or reading Nancy Drew or practicing out her sign language dictionary, once in

awhile sipping on her own coffee (decaf, because when Hopper let her drink regular, objects started to float off shelves and the radio danced back and forth between channels), listening to Flo gossiping as she twirled the long phone cord around her painted fingernail. "Well of course Mrs. Martin despises Mrs. Bobinski, remember the casserole disaster?" "Monica was supposed to be teaching Sunday School. I don't know *where* she got the idea that Rachel could do it. We have that woman leading the hymns for a reason." "No, I didn't know that Elmer's son had gotten married. Honestly, I thought that even after all these years he'd end up at the station one day."

Today is different though. Today, Flo has hung up the phone.

Today, Flo has *yarn*.

"What is yarn?" El asks, sitting beside the older woman, elbows propped on the older woman's desk, swiveling in her own special chair.

"It's a special kind of thread," Flo says, well used to Eleven's quiet curiosity by this point. As she speaks, the two needles in her hands clack together like music. Not at all like the music Jonathan shows her, more like the music Mrs. Wheeler hums along with when she bakes cakes. Flo pauses to hold up the two thin sticks in her hands. "Using these needles, I can knit together all sorts of things."

Needles? A shiver travels up El's spine, threatening to steal her voice away. El takes a deep breath, just as she's been taught to. They don't look like *those* needles.

"Like what?"

"Hats, scarves, sweaters," Flo tells her. "This here, this will be a poncho."

El has no idea what a poncho is. In her mind she can picture a fish—that's what the word reminds her of, but there appears to be no reason why Flo would be knitting a kind of fish out of bright purple yarn. Swallowing the question, she instead switches to another.

"Can't you get those things at the store?" El asks, glaring at the pale

pink ball of yarn in her own fingers. Flo has put her in charge of untangling the angry mess, but she's beginning to think she's only created a bigger problem. That knot wasn't there a second ago... She yanks at it, and her lungs hitch when it unwinds and- no. That's *another* knot.

"You can, dear," Flo says. El's frustration softened at the word dear; El loved the term of endearment. It almost takes her mind off the task in front of her. "But there's something so..." She waves the two needles around, and El waits for her to find her next words.. "Good about making your own clothing. Also, it's fun to create things. There's nothing quite like it." She winks, not before glancing at El's bundle of knots.

El sits quietly for a moment, letting those words sink in, staring at the tangled mess she's managed to make more tangled. She's never created something before, not like that. It wasn't what Experiment Eleven was intended for.

But she's no longer Experiment Eleven.

Resolve and hope fill her as her fingers curl into the pink ball of softness, and suddenly, untangling the yarn didn't feel as impossible.

"Can- can you teach me?" El asks. Her voice is quiet, but sounds too loud in her own ears. "How to knit?"

Flo looks up and smiles. "Of course, dear. We'll start right away, once, of course, you untangle all of that."

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"Chief, you still need to fill out these reports..."

Pressing his palms to his eyes, Hopper choses to ignore Callahan's drone of a voice. Six hours of staring at witness reports and citizen complaints and letters from the mayor and whatever the *hell* the PTA wanted- they'd signed a petition, but Hopper had quickly handed it off to Powell By the time the arms of the clock hit the numbers five and fifteen, Hopper's eyes were on the verge of falling out of his head. He had skipped the sack lunch El handed him this morning and

a phone call from Joyce all because he wanted to get home early. Maybe go see a movie with the kid or something.

“You know what, Callahan, just put em back in the file. Save it for tomorrow.” standing from his desk, Hopper walks out, trying not to smirk when Callahan curses in relief. He then makes his way down the hall, whistling and waving a half hearted goodbye to other officers.

Finally, he thinks to himself, a few hours of peace and quiet.

“Are you ready to go, Eleven...” Chief enters the bullpen, trailing off as he takes in the scene in front of him.

Flo and Eleven are huddled together at her desk. Like usual, the station’s secretary sits tall to offset her small stature, elbows set, holding what looks to be a purple blanket. His foster child is tangled up in all sorts of colors of yarn, tongue sticking out in concentration (Hopper’s shoulders fall, hoping she didn’t pick that little mannerism from the Wheeler kid) her fingers white around two knitting needles she’s clutching in fists. At the end, a lopsided, pale pink bundled mess that doesn’t look to Hopper like much of anything.

“It’s harder than it looks,” Eleven almost hisses before he can comment, a small glare meeting his own eyes from under all the stray strings of yarn adorning her like a craft store halo. Hopper smirks. That girl knew him well enough to know that yes, he did have a sarcastic comment up his sleeve.

Had she really been around that along?

“She’s a very quick learner,” Flo adds, giving him an arching look, as if daring him to pull that sarcastic comment out off his sleeve. But Hopper knew better than that.

“Are you ready to go, El?” he repeats, trying to keep the peace. He knows better than to go against either of them, but together? He stands no goddamn chance.

At least Joyce wasn’t there.

The kid never used many words, instead shaking her head and letting

the yarn spill around her. "I just started..." she mutters in a such a quiet voice Hopper had to strain to hear her.

"C'mon kid," Hopper shakes his head. It takes all his restraint not to sigh or spill that sarcastic comment. "We have to go home, gotta let Flo get a little work done, okay?"

"But," she juts her bottom lip out and casts her wide brown eyes down at the jumbled pink yarn. A wave of almost respect came over Hopper; El could cast her pretty little brown eyes on anything and you'd want more than anything to say the word yes, and even if he didn't like the kid- well, most of the time- ("Oh, like you were such a saint at that age," he can hear Joyce reprimand in his mind,) he had to hand it to the Wheeler kid for accepting his fate, because the boy was pretty much screwed.

"You've been working for at least three hours, sweetheart, a break won't hurt. You're doing well, and absence makes the heart grow fonder. But take the needles and yarn so you can practice at home." Clicking her tongue, Flo swivels in her chair to turn to Hopper. "She takes after you, you know. No breaks, this one. Determined to figure it out rather than just call it quits. She'll make a good knitter."

Hopper sighs, a surefire way of not bringing his foremost thought out into the open, the "You know, Flo, she's not *really* my kid" moment. There were moments, frequent and raw, Eleven would say or do something and all he could see, all he could picture was his little girl, the sweet wide eyed light he'd seen burned out. The first months with the kid were the hardest, and would have ended in disaster had it not been for Joyce's motherly instinct. Time went on, like it always did, and Hopper crushed burning cigarettes under his heel, sometime losing himself in the thoughts of what Sarah would be like if she'd made it to Eleven's age. But Eleven was not Sarah, and would never be Sarah, and none of that mattered because Sarah was gone. And although, the kid in front of him, tangled in yarn, determination in her gaze, was no longer just the science experiment he'd sold out three years ago to save Will Byers, the word "daughter"- he just couldn't give that to her.

It was moments like these that made him wish he hadn't quit smoking.

“Are you saying I’d make a good knitter?”

Hopper knew her raised eyebrow was going to be Flo’s only answer to that question. “Joyce called,” she continues instead.

“I know, couldn’t pick it up. Was trying to get Powell to take the damn- I mean relevant” Hopper quickly corrects when both Flo and El shoot him a look, “PTA petition so I could file case reports. What’d she need? She okay?”

“Oh, no need to worry, Hop. She just has the night off and wanted to know if you would care to join her for dinner tonight.” Flo trails off, her voice annoyingly light.

“Ooooooooooooooh,” El whistles and wiggles her eyebrows. She must of picked that up from those misfit friends of hers, too.

“You keep up with that sass young lady,” Hopper strokes his chin, “And you can kiss Friday nights with that Wheeler boy goodbye.”

Her eyes narrow, but he knows she isn’t using her abilities. “You *wouldn’t*.”

“Oh but I would. C’mon kid, let’s get out of here.” He turns on his heel, the sounds of huffing and sighing telling him his foster kid had given up her fight, toward the door before a familiar inkling of fatherly instinct kicks in. “Oh, uh, what do you tell Flo? For giving up her time to teach you how to knit?”

He expects her to make the simple motion of tapping her chin (the Wheelers were paying for *Speech* therapy, it went beyond Hopper why the therapist was teaching her how to *sign*) or cast her eyes down and whisper a small thank you, but the kid takes him by complete surprise by half-tackling Flo in a crushing hug.

“Thank you for teaching me how to knit,” El pretty much purrs.

Flo lets out a loud laugh. “Oh, you’re welcome sweetheart, but don’t walk out of here thinking we’re done with our lessons!”

Leaning on the door, Hopper begins to tap his foot.

"Really? You'll teach me more?" El's eyes light up, and Hopper's heart constricts. That pure inquisitive curiosity and childlike wonder.... She just looks so much like... No, that's not a road to walk anymore. Because the road is long, long gone.

"Of course, honey. It will be like having grandchildren." Flo shoots him *that* look and all Hopper can mouth back is "*don't start.*"

"And," she continues, her gaze back on Eleven, "once you feel comfortable enough you can to the knitting circle some of the church ladies and I have after Sunday School."

"That sounds fun!" Eleven chirps, going in for another hug.

That sounds like the *opposite* of fun to Hopper, but slowly something dawns on- something profound - with Eleven by his side, still clutching the yarn and needles, as they exit the station into the autumn air.

A group of knitting old ladies was *the farthest* thing from a group of teenage boys.

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Back through the loop, bring the yarn behind, bring it over, now bring the loop over the needle-

"Whatcha doin', El?"

Momentary panic overtakes her, and El feels as if she's jumped a few feet in the air. But more importantly, the surprise has made her drop her needles, and lose her place.

"Nothing." she growls at Will, the source of the surprise, his head just outside the door. He shrinks back just a little, replacing the panic with immediate guilt. El swallows, bending down and picking the needles back up.

"Sorry," she whispers, eyes down.

"It's okay." Will tells her, smiling again. "It was my fault for scaring you. But seriously, what *are* you doing?"

El runs her fingers over the yarn. The loops on her needle are the product of starting over for the twentieth time, a product of frustration, a product of the sickening desire for perfection. Flo had spent most of their time teaching her how to cast on the yarn and it was how she had spent the last hour.

“There, now bring it over, just like that. See, it’s easy.” Flo praised and El felt enlightened- until she compared her messy loops to Flo’s smooth and perfect ones.

“They don’t look like yours,” El pouted. Something in the back of her mind was whispering, a familiar voice she had locked away rattling its chains, calling for freedom.

“Well, that’s to be expected. I’ve had years of practice and I’ve done so many projects, that’s why. You’ll get it.” Gently, Flo took the needle filled with the messy stitches from El’s pensive grip. “Oh, these are too tight.”

“Oh.”

“Look at mine, El. See how they are loose? I can still pull on them. I’ll be able to fit the needles through, but yours are too tight.” Flo demonstrated by taking a long silver needle and attempting to slip it under El’s stitches. It wouldn’t budge.

“I know it feels better if the loops are tighter, but those are just knots. You can’t work with knots. What you need is more of an opening, a chance for the string to pass through, to connect.”

Every word she spoke, El drunk in.

“With the knots you may feel more in control of the string, but knitting isn’t about control. Knitting is about relaxing, about letting the yarn take its own path, and to be it’s guide. So even if you make a mistake, I want you to keep going.”

And that was the hardest part. To fight the internal part of her, written into her bones and blood with the salt water of bathtubs and needles not meant to create things, that wanted to be perfect, because she so desperately needed to please, needed approval. His approval.

So she kept starting over, even if Flo had told her not too. Hopper

had taken Joyce to dinner and then to the movies, dropping El off at the Byers' upon picking Joyce up (on most of their 'date' nights-Hopper and Joyce both tried to deny they were in fact, dates, but even El, who couldn't even get a certain freckle-faced mouth breather to ask her out, knew that was total lie- Will and El were alone, but tonight Jonathan was home from university and was not, to everyone's surprise, spending the night in Nancy's bedroom) where she had gone straight to Will's room and pulled the needles straight back out.

The cast on messy, but successful, El gauged it wasn't too tight, she began the first row.

Back through the loop, bring the yarn behind, bring it over, now bring the loop over the needle. Back through the loop, bring the yarn behind, bring it over, now bring the loop over the needle.

El surveys her results upon finishing the row, and that's when she hears him. For the first time in years that have blended and blurred together.

Again.

Do- do I have to, Papa?

And El slides the string of yarn off the needles, letting it unravel sadly to the floor.

Back through the loop, bring the yarn behind, bring it over, now bring the loop over the needle. The curl of her knuckles. The chill up her spine.

Again.

Back through the loop, bring the yarn behind, bring it over, now bring the loop over the needle. She can't do this.

Again.

Every single time she starts, she stops, hands shaking as she pulls the yarn off again. Time is falling away around her, and the walls are morphing, bleeding into white.

Back through the loop- Again- bring the yarn behind- Again- bring it over- Eleven, again- now bring the loop over the needle- Eleven, this is terrible. Start again.

Her fingers clench around the needles. They feel like swords in her hands, ones to cast away demons and monsters. She feels like a warrior.

Shut. Up.

Back through the loop, bring the yarn behind, bring it over, now bring the loop over the needle.

Again.

“No.” she whispers, and starts the second row, triumph in her chest.

Back through the loop, bring the yarn behind, bring it over, now bring the loop over the needle.

Eleven. Again.

“No!” Faster and faster she goes. There’s a cramp crawling up her left hand, and she can feel the blood slowly start to drip from her nose, but something in her keeps going.

Just like it always has.

Back through the loop, bring the yarn behind, bring it over, now bring the loop over the needle.

Again, again, AGAIN, ELEVEN, I SAID AGAIN, I SAID AGAIN-

“GET OUT OF MY HEAD!” She screams. The air rushes from her lungs like it’s breaking free, but she feels heavy. But looking down, she doesn’t see a reason to stop. She can always fight through this pain, this feeling of the universe tearing her apart. It’s was she was made her, what they turned her into.

Back through the loop, bring the yarn behind, bring it over, now bring the loop over the needle, okay, okay I can do this, I can do this, back through the loop, bring the yarn behind, bring it over, now bring the loop over the

needle-

And that's when Will decides to stop by and ask what's she doing.

He plops on the bed after apologizing for scaring her, and narrows his eyes at the needles in her hands. "Is that- is that crocheting?"

El has no idea what *crocheting* is, but an excitement rushes through her at the thought of showing somebody her hard-earned progress. "No, it's knitting! See!" She practically shoves the needles into Will's face, and watches as his nose scrunches up. He's trying really hard not to, El can see that, but a few giggles escape him.

"Will!"

"I'm sorry, El," Will giggles, "I promise I'm not laughing at you, but-but-"

"But what?" she shoves him in the shoulder, but his laughter only doubles.

"It's the thought of you knitting, okay! I just-" he paused to catch his breath, "that's really hard to imagine."

That's really hard to imagine. His words smothered with honesty bother her, but she can't say why. Beside her, Will continues to giggle silently, increasing El's urge to kick him in the shin. "I don't understand."

Will wipes the tears from his eyes with the back of his hand before handing her her needles back, El brings them close to her chest. "Well, no offense, but you're like this super hero. You've fought monsters and flipped over cars and can break bones with your brain, so it's just weird to imagine you knitting."

Everything in El deflates. What joy that had come with knitting two rows dissipates, leaving her heart heavy and hurting. "Oh."

"Don't be sad!" Will almost yells. His face is contorted in guilt as he reaches for her needles. "It's not that I think you can't do it-"

They're suddenly interrupted by Jonathan, wearing his 'Kiss the

Cook' apron, that as a gift from his Nancy, always made him walk the line between confidence and "being an ass" as Mike called it. "What are you two up to?"

"El's learning how to knit," Will explains, lifting up the needles still in El's grip.

A similar reaction to his brother's take over Jonathan, and then he's laughing and it makes Will laugh and makes El beyond irritated. "It's not funny!" She yells, shaking the needles and yarn in her hands. But it only serves to make them laugh even harder. Jonathan is gripping the door way and Will is gripping his sides and it's a whole three minutes that El sees pass on Will's alarm clock before either manage to calm down. Her glare helps.

"Are you *done*?" El asks them. It's one of Hopper's favorite phrases. He uses it when El is using too much syrup on her Eggos or Callahan is "bitching again" (another favorite phrase) or Flo is lecturing him on dating Joyce or being a father.

Will snorts again, and chokes on another round of laughter, but nods. "Mhmm."

"Where, uh," Jonathan swallows his own laughter before continuing. "Who's teaching you how to knit?"

"Flo is." El takes a deep breath and brings the needle behind the other to start her row over.

Out of the corner of her eye, Jonathan straightens. "Really? I didn't know she knits."

"Is she still mad at me about the tape thing?" Will's voice is quiet, and his shoulders have fallen.

"Yes, and yes." El nods and Will lets out a long sigh. "But I'm sure she'll forgive you. Once she stops finding tape around the station."

Jonathan sends Will a look that says *What's that about?* Will only sinks further into the bed as his answer. The three of them sit there, silence enveloping them, and El can feel their eyes on her as she pulls loop after loop over the needle. Finally, she drops them and sighs.

"If you guys think this is dumb then I won't do it."

"What?" Will shouts. "We never said that!"

"Yeah, we think it's cool. I mean, I don't have the patience to do something like that. I'd give up pretty fast." Jonathan nodded.

"Me too. Besides, people think the stuff we do is dumb. Like Jonathan, with his camera. That's pretty lame." Will whispers the last part, and smiles wide in victory when El chuckles.

"Oh yeah? What about Will and his dumb drawings? He can't ever get his head out of his sketch book!" Jonathan fires back and Will whirls around, flailing his arms, but this time it's El who's laughing uncontrollably.

"Hey!" He shouts. To El, it sounds like he's trying to hold back his own laughter, "I know we're trying to cheer El up, but too far!"

"You started it, I just piled on. And besides, neither of us is Mike, so cheering this one up is gonna take a little more effort." El laughs as Jonathan speaks, right up until he's talking about Mike. Then the heat starts in her cheeks and spreads through her cheeks. They're right, and she knows it, but she glares her daggers at them anyway.

"True." Will snorts, and it earns him a punch in the shoulder. "Ow!"

Jonathan snickers again, before enveloping his little brother by the shoulders. "C'mon Gremlin One and Gremlin Two, dinner's ready."

Dinner turns out to be spaghetti, and El enjoys herself, listening to the brothers' banter. Will teases Jonathan endlessly about Nancy and asks in a variation of cartoonish voices when he's going to ask her to marry him. It's funny until the boys team up and turn on her.

"I'll marry Nancy when Mike asks El out."

"Well then," Will leans in on his elbow and lifts one eyebrow, "you're never marrying Nancy because El and Mike would rather stare at each other then-"

No one, not even Will, is surprised when Will's plate of spaghetti flies

up out of nowhere and hits him straight in the face.

She goes back to hide in Will's room after cleaning up the kitchen and helping do the dishes ("Well at least *someone* is helping me!") Jonathan yelled at the bathroom as he and El were elbows deep in soap suds. "There's spaghetti in my *nose* , Jonathan! And in my hair!") but Will drags her out of her cave to be with them in the living room where Jonathan has laid out newest prints of his pictures on the caving coffee table to inspect and Will has dumped all his colored pencils out onto the floor in a chaotic rainbow.

"Stay with us out here. We'll do our dumb stuff together."

He means well, and she enjoys the quietness of being with them, Jonathan humming and the scratch of Will's pencils against paper as the needles in her hand , but later after Hopper picks her up and Mike calls, telling her all about his day and then feverently asking about hers, she can't bring herself to tell him the truth.

Author's Note:

I know the ending is kind left on a sad note, but more is coming. Part two is purely Mileven and a lot of silliness with yarn. And don't worry, everyone who is doubting El's knitting skills will come around and Hopper will come to accept his roll in El's life.

Until part two, we would love feedback or any ideas you have for projects El could do as a knitter!!!!!!
Stay woke ;)